

Impact Factor: 8.67

ISSN:0976-8165



THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

Bi-Monthly Peer-Reviewed eJournal

16 YEARS OF OPEN ACCESS

VOL. 16 ISSUE-1, FEBRUARY 2025

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ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

www.galaxyimrj.com

Reading Culture among Students: The Activity Model of Reading

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14980099>

Article History: Submitted-06/01/2025, Revised-22/01/2025, Accepted-04/02/2025, Published-28/02/2025.

Abstract:

The importance of reading for intellectual growth and the enhancement of creative abilities cannot be overstated. Regrettably, the practice of reading is on the decline among the younger generation. This paper, based on an experimental study, is aimed at developing a reading competency model for college students. Based on primary data from college students, the paper examines the factors contributing to the decline in reading habits among students and suggests actions they can take to improve their reading habits. Inputs received from the primary data collection have been used to create a model to develop reading culture and enhance competency.

Keywords: reading culture, reading reluctance, learning experience, reading culture, reading model, activity model.

Introduction:

Sir Francis Bacon once said, “Reading maketh a full man”. The significance of reading can never be undermined if one wants to grow intellectually and build on one’s imaginative faculties to the fullest. Unfortunately, the habit of reading is dwindling amongst today’s youth who rather prefer spending time on any form of social media. The fact that, today all institutes

of higher education in India have to compulsorily observe the National Reading Day and that a substantial portion of the National Education Policy 2020 stresses on 'reading' and 'self-study' speaks volumes about the declining culture of reading and the need to revive it among students. However, developing reading skills among students who have removed themselves from the joys of reading is definitely an uphill task. This paper tries to enhance the reading skills of students by developing a model of reading keeping in mind the needs and requirements of Gen-Z.

This paper looks into the concept of reading culture among students. It seeks to find the reasons for reluctances in reading among students and analyse the dwindling reading experiences gained from/through reading. It attempts to find out ways of cultivating reading culture among students and strives to find strategies to overcome reading reluctances. The paper finally develops a reading competency model called the Activity Model of Reading which is based on the experiences of the students.

Methodology:

The study is based on an experimental procedure conducted on a total of 120 students, who form the primary database. The Model is assessed on Pre-test and Post-test results with an Intervention of 5 Months (July – November 2024) between Pre-test and Post-test. Inputs based on the data collected is translated into developing a Reading Competency Model for college-going students. The tests are analysed through a Structured Questionnaire to comprehend the model's aptness.

The study also digs to find out what the teachers and student-readers feel about reading. Hence, a separate questionnaire was provided to the teachers and students to understand it.

Existing Literature:

Reading and Reading Culture

According to Ifedili (2009), reading has several benefits, such as promoting societal advancement, international understanding, personal well-being, information acquisition, and the development of a positive outlook that prevents laziness or boredom. highlighting the fact that reading is not just for academic accomplishments, but also increases the likelihood of success in school and in life. As seen, a culture of good reading is linked to academic success. A poor reader doesn't plan for academic success, which eventually causes frustration and, finally, academic failure.

According to Agade (2008), reading is an essential learning tool throughout the many levels of the contemporary educational system since it speeds up the learning process and successfully fosters students' intellectual growth.

According to Sandars (2007), reading improves life quality and gives access to culture and cultural history, making it crucial for full involvement in modern society.

Reading culture, according to Ailakhu and Unegbu, is the practice of reading for pleasure rather than solely academic purposes. However, they underlined that reading eventually stops being a difficult chore that must be completed in order to pass an exam and instead has an inherent value as something to be done for enjoyment until a desire to read more is established.

According to Nyam, reading culture is the practice of reading as a usual and normal activity which results in the development of a mindset and the control of abilities that make reading an enjoyable, consistent, and ongoing activity.

Reading Models

In K. Stanovich's (1980) "Interactive Model" readers predict what they will read in a text by drawing on prior knowledge of the topic matter, prior familiarity with written language, past

reading experiences, and their own expectations. According to Ann Browne's (1998) "Bottom-up Model" the foundation of reading for students is their understanding of letters, sounds, and words as well as how sentences are put together using these words. Further, in Ann Browne's (1998) "Top-down Model" readers start to read by using their knowledge of language structure and meaning, existing stories and other genres, and predict meanings in existing context(s).

The issue in these three Models is that they are for children or young learners and not for young adult learners.

Hollis Scarborough's (2001) "Reading Rope" looks into sub-skills related to reading like language comprehension and word recognition leading to skilled reading.

Aaron and Joshi's (2000) "Componential Model" encourages to go beyond cognitive skills and look into psychological and ecological factors affecting reading competencies. Nell Duke and Kelly Cartwright's (2021) "Active View of Reading" include a bridge between decoding and language comprehension and adds self-regulation skills a reader uses to monitor their reading

The issue in these Models is that all these are for educators/teachers to aid developing reading skills in learners.

"Dual-route Model", whose proponents are Max Coltheart, Uta Frith, Philip Seymour, and David Share, looks at reading from two ways: Phonological route (applying letter-sound relationships to sound out unfamiliar words) and Orthographic route identifies a familiar word by its spelling patterns. Walter Kinstch's (1988) "Construction-Integration Model" reflects that reading includes factors like activating prior knowledge, generating inferences, resolving inconsistencies, and integrating information across sentences and paragraphs.

The issue in these Models is that they for beginners and do not cater to greater needs of reading for young adult readers.

Identifying reading barriers – reluctances:

Table 1

Reluctances of readers

Teachers	Young adult readers
Restlessness	Unsure of what genre/book to read
Reading anxiety	Difficulty in understanding
Lack of concentration	Stress
Not a priority	Little or no access to books
Reading only for exams	Size and cost of books
Frustrating experience	Lack of proper reading space
Social media	Social media
Disinterested	Disinterested
Feeling of information overload	Feeling of information overload
	Labelled as a bookworm

Source: Primary Data Collection

Table 1 shows the reluctances in reading among the young adult readers according to the teachers and the readers. The teachers feel that young adult readers are reluctant of reading because they are restless and suffer from reading anxiety. To the teachers, the young adult readers suffer from lack of concentration, who do not think that reading should be a priority for them. Reading, according to the teachers, is a frustrating experience and hence, they read

only before exams. Further, more exposure to the use of social media also makes the young adult readers reluctant towards reading. The teachers are of the opinion that the readers feel that reading is a sort of information overload for them which they cannot cope up with. Hence, they are disinterested in reading.

As far as the young adult readers are concerned, they say that they are reluctant to read because they are unsure of what they should read. They often get confused about what to read and hence, end up without reading anything. The young adult readers also say that they do not like to read many a times because they find the text difficult to understand. The fear of being mocked or labelled as bookworms by peers often keep them away from taking help of teachers in this direction. Some of the young adult readers also think that reading is stressful and hence, they avoid reading much. Few among them say that they have little to no access to books as those that interest them are pretty costly and they are unable to get access to those books. Size of the books also seem to scare them and make them reluctant to read. The young readers further say that lack of proper reading space either at home makes them reluctant to read. However, the readers seem to concur with the teachers when it comes to the use of social media, feeling of information overload and a sense of disinterestedness.

Identifying reading barriers – dwindling learning experiences:

Table 2

Reasons for the dwindling learning experiences

Teachers	Young adult readers
Problems related to stylistics	Retention disabilities
Concept formation difficulty	Do not find it engrossing
Lack of attention & concentration	No enthusiasm

Know and understand everything	Gist/summary available on internet
Cognitive & environmental factors	You Tube videos
Changing priorities	Feeling of having known before
Preconceived notions	Inability in understanding a subject

Source: Primary Data Collection

Table 2 shows the reasons for the dwindling learning experiences which can be gained from reading among the young adult readers according to the teachers and the readers. The teachers feel that learning experiences could be dwindling because of the inability among the young adult readers to study and interpret texts in an appropriate way which leads to a difficulty in concept formation. The teachers think that the young adult learners lack attention and concentration as they are not focussed on their goals and/or they think that they already know and understand everything. The teachers are also of the opinion that cognitive and environmental factors such as inability to understand, remember, or think cognitively and also peer and social media influence could also be responsible for the dwindling learning experiences. At the present time, the teachers think, the priorities attached to reading have changed where reading is not done for learning, understanding, and knowledge-enhancing. The present generation of young readers are also full of preconceived notions which can be seen as a barrier in gaining learning experiences from reading.

The young adult readers opine that they are unable to retain what they read and hence do not like to read much other than just prepare the night before examinations. Some find that reading does not excite them and hence, even if they read, they do not find it engrossing which could be the result of a lack of enthusiasm among them. The young adult readers also say that since they either get the gist/summary available on internet or explanation on You Tube videos, hence

they do not feel it necessary to read. The young readers further state that they do not like to read as they feel that they already have much knowledge about certain topics or a subject that they do not require further reading. A few of them, however, state that their inability in understanding a subject keeps them away from reading and gaining experiences thereof.

The Activity Model of Reading:

The barriers discussed are sufficient to understand that there are significant reasons among the young readers because of which they do not like to read. When this occurs, it is crucial to resist giving up and instead spend time figuring out why one has trouble in reading. Perhaps a certain area requires special focus, such as their vocabulary or understanding abilities. Sometimes all it takes is selecting the correct/appropriate book and nobody should feel bad about reading at or beyond their reading level for everyone develops a fondness for reading at a different rate.

It is essential that the young adult readers are motivated to start reading to inculcate the habit of reading and the joys associated with it. The Activity Model of Reading is an appropriate mode by which the young adult readers can be motivated to begin reading.

The Model created is based on the following skills required for reading:

- i. *Understanding the types of reading* (skimming, scanning, critical, appreciative, etc.): It is very important that readers need to understand the different forms of reading. Without having a clarity and understanding of the different types of reading, the readers will not realise how reading should be done. Reading should not be for reading's sake, but for learning's sake and, hence, recognizing what kind of reading is appropriate is of utmost importance.
- ii. *Understanding the motive for reading* (exams, studies, pleasure, etc.): It is essential that readers understand the purpose of reading. Reading is done for exams or studies or

pleasure, etc. If readers are unable to comprehend the motive, then they will not be able to generate interest in reading. Hence, readers should be able to realise themselves why they are reading.

- iii. *Understanding aids to reading* (dictionary, index on books, content page, figures, graphs, pictures & photos, etc.): Many a times, it is found that readers do not understand the purpose of understanding and using the various aids to reading appropriately. In today's world where young adult readers are very tech savvy, reading soft copies downloaded from the internet is easier. However, most of the times they are found to be confused when they are told to take help of the aids to reading. Hence, it is extremely essential that readers are able to understand these aids which will make reading and understanding easy.
- iv. *Understanding motives of the writer* (why, how, what, when): Readers often read for the sake of reading. They forget to understand why the text has been written, i.e., they forget to understand the motives of the writer. Before a book is read, it is important to gauge into why and how the text was written, what and when motivated the writer to write it. Once that is understood, the readers will be able to appreciate the work of the writer.

The Model created rests on the principle of Reading not for Reading's Sake, but Reading for Learning's Sake. The Model looks into developing skills and knowledge to appreciate, understand, analyse and evaluate texts.

The process of the Activity Model develops on the following aspects:

- i. *Understanding Reading:* At the onset, the young adult readers need to be explained what reading means and the types of reading. The readers must be made to realise the reasons why reading is necessary and the requirements for reading.
- ii. *Understanding reading reluctances:* It is necessary that before the activity starts, the reading reluctances should be understood. If the ailment is not diagnosed, then the prescribed remedy will not work. Overt or covert means can be adopted to elicit the causes of reading reluctances.
- iii. *Overcoming reluctancies:* Once the reluctances are realised, ways should be generated to enhance reading aptitude. For this, the young adult readers must be made to realise that reading aligns with their goals to success. They must be provided with the support to create a culture of reading through motivational coaching and supervision.
- iv. *Conducting Reading Sessions:* Conducting reading sessions can work to the level of generating interests among the young adult readers. Inviting authors or guest speakers to read and discuss can help motivate the young readers to develop a passion not just for reading but also for writing. Dialogic exercises are key to opening minds to fresh new horizons.
- v. *Enhancing other Skills:* The young adult readers must also be made to realise that reading helps in enhancing other skills like Listening, Speaking and Writing. One who reads well, listens well, speaks well and writes well.

- vi. *Enhancing Grammatical Skills:* Apart from developing LSW Skills, reading also helps in improving grammar skills. This is a fact that must be instilled in the mind of the young adult readers. Reading is a part of the practical exercise in grammar for it shows the reader how various parts of speech and other grammatical rules are applied. The readers can be told to make a comparative analysis of how they write and how the author writes in terms of grammar and syntax to make them aware of the applications of grammatical rules.

- vii. *Improving Vocabulary:* That reading improves vocabulary can never be an understatement and, hence, this must be informed vigorously to the young adult readers that the more they read, their stock of vocabulary will increase, thereby increasing their style of writing and speaking. Exercises to this effect can be introduced by making the young readers write down five new words along with their meanings and a sentence on each word to be discussed in the class the following day. This will help all the readers in the class who will learn new words and explore the joy of using new words in their daily communication.

- viii. *Learning the usage of Figures of Speech:* Reading also helps in learning the usage of figures of speech. Writers often tend to use figures of speech. The readers need to be first made aware of the different forms of figures of speech and how to locate them while reading. This will make the readers not only understand the meaning of the text but also help them use the figures of speech in their communication, either written or verbal.

- ix. *Learning the Art of Writing:* Reading sessions must be made such that they make the readers understand the art of writing. Skills required for writing need to be explained to the readers so that they understand how writers write. This way, the readers will be able to generate the skills of writing themselves. Appropriate motivation should be given to the readers that they can also become writers whose works will be read by multitudes.
- x. *Creative Writing and Reading:* Reading enhances all-round development of the reader. Not only does the reader become aware of the different nuances of reading but can even dabble with creative writing, be it self-composed short story or poem or any other genre of writing. The readers skills must be developed that they write something, no matter how it is, what matters is the impact they make upon themselves by realising their self-potential. Such pieces of writing must be given their due by making the readers read what they have composed and a lively discussion can be held on that to generate further enthusiasm.
- xi. *Creation of a Reading Space and Environment:* It is very important that proper spaces should be created for the readers to read and express themselves singularly or dialogically. For this, proper Reading Clubs can be formed giving the readers the required space to explore reading and express themselves through reading.

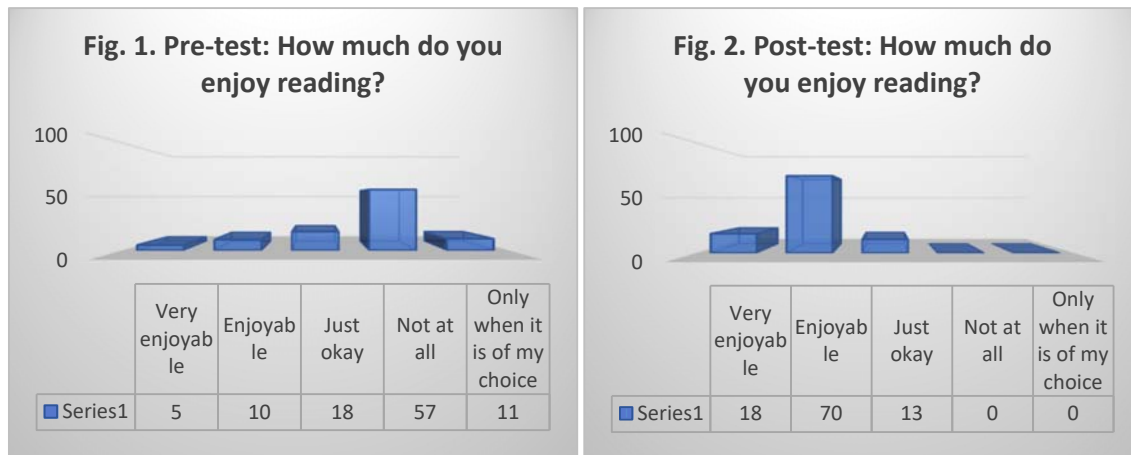
Since the model is called Activity Model, hence, the following activities are part of the Reading exercise:

- i. Ice-breaking through small talks
- ii. Understanding the attitude of readers, their likes and dislikes in/for reading through discussions

- iii. Learning how to use the tools for reading
- iv. Reading for personal enhancement by finding ways to read, write, listen and speak
- v. Reading for fun
- vi. Reading for discussion
- vii. Reading for critical thinking and analysis
- viii. Reading for learning skills
- ix. Reading for speaking skills
- x. Reading drills to improve voice, intonation, etc.
- xi. Organizing Reading Sessions
- xii. Creative writing and reading followed by discussions

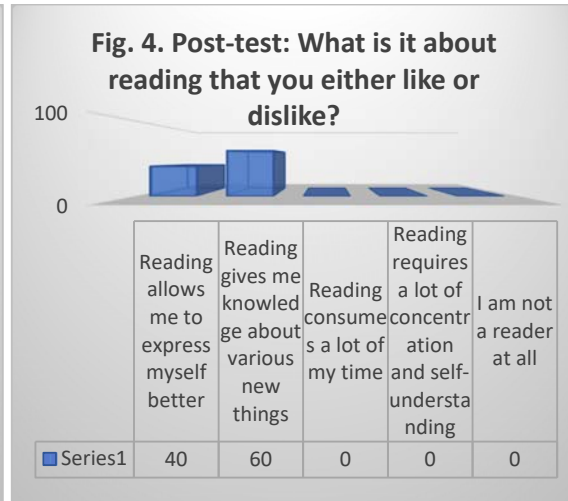
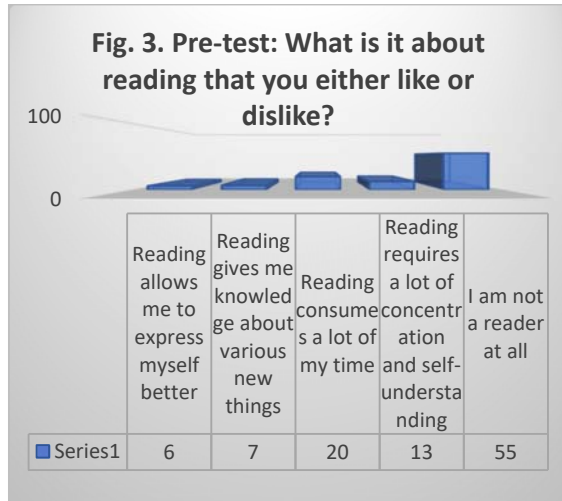
Analyses of Data:

The analysis of the Pre-test and Post-test is presented below:

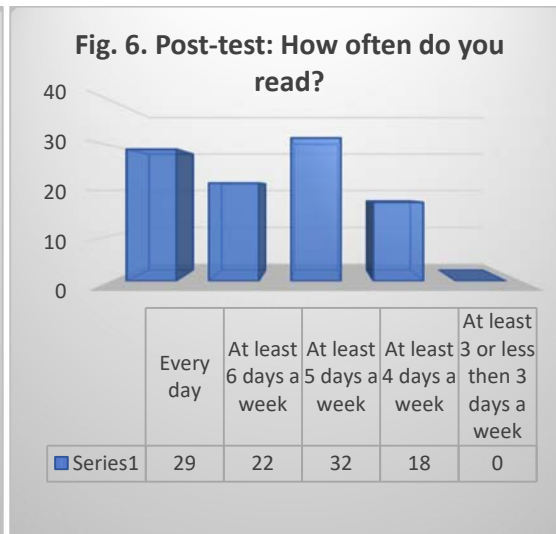
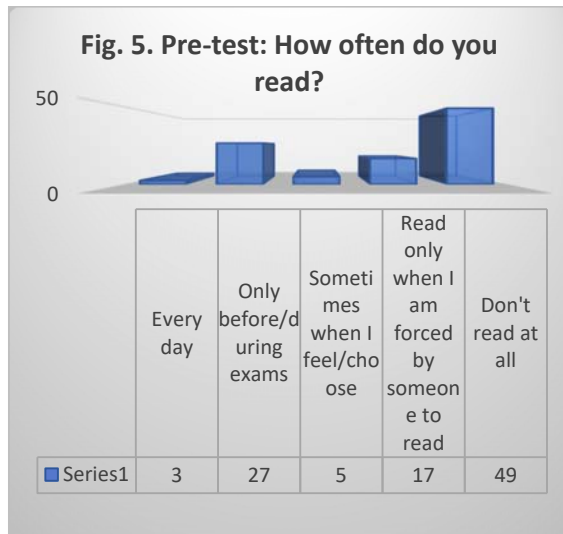


Figures 1 and 2 show the results of how much the young adult readers enjoy reading. Before the model was tested, the readers were asked how much they enjoy reading where 57% of the respondents said that they do not enjoy reading at all. However, after the model was tested,

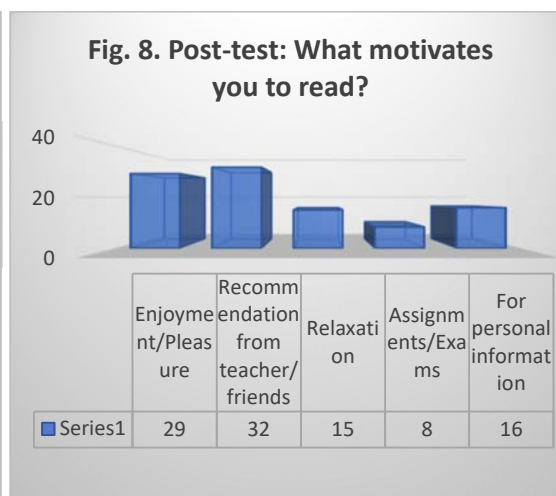
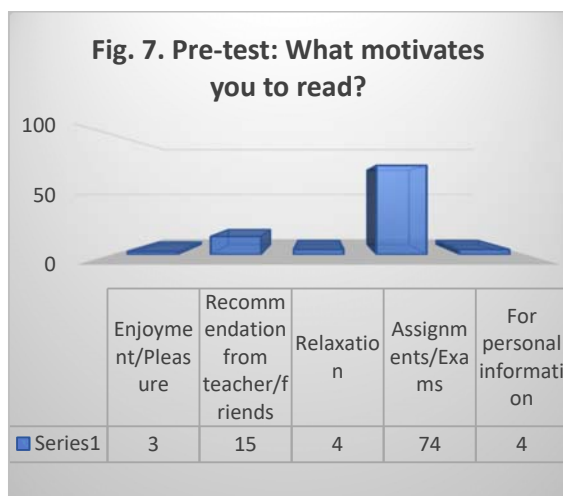
70% of the respondents said that they find reading enjoyable. This shows that if reading is done through the activity mode, then reading can bring in joy to the readers.



Figures 3 and 4 show the results of what the readers like or dislike about reading. Prior to testing of the activity model, 55% of the respondents said that they do not consider themselves to be readers. After the model was tested, 60% of the respondents said that reading gives them knowledge about various new things and 40% of the respondents said that reading allows them to express themselves better. This is reflective that they activity model can certainly help the readers to develop their skills in reading.

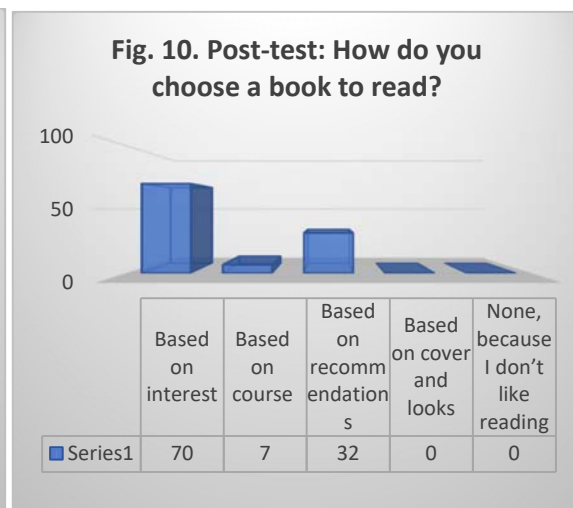
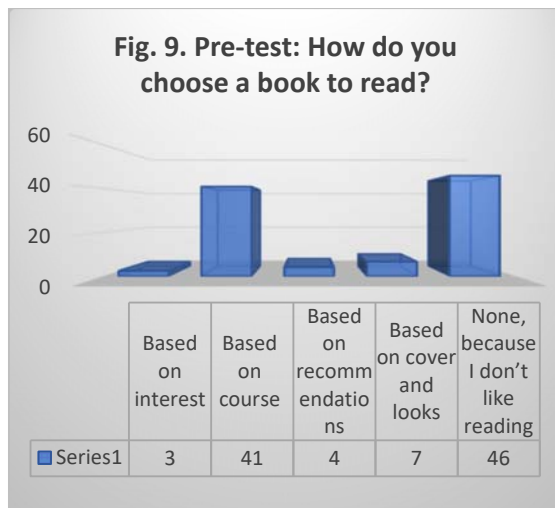


Figures 5 and 6 show the results of how often the young adult readers read. 49% of the respondents said that they do not read at all, with 27% saying that they read before or during exams only prior to the testing of the model. After the model was tested, 32% of the respondents said that they read at least 5 days a week and 29% said that they read daily. This is reflective of the improvement made by the young readers post testing of the activity model of reading.

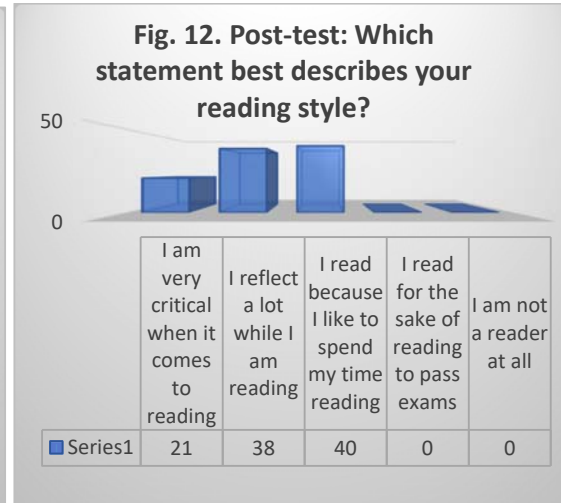
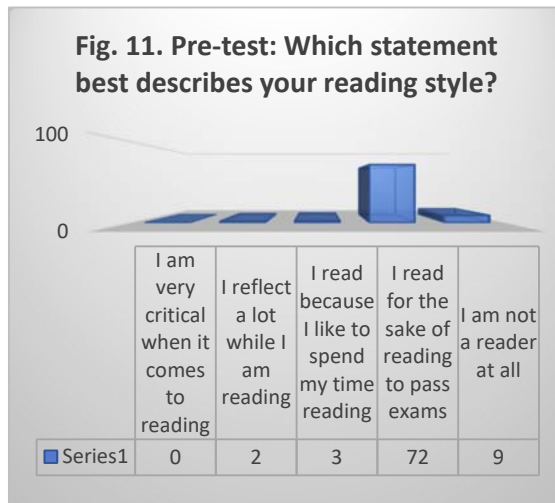


Figures 7 and 8 shows what motivates the respondents to read. The pre-test result shows that 74% of the respondents read only to write assignments or exams and 15% say that they read

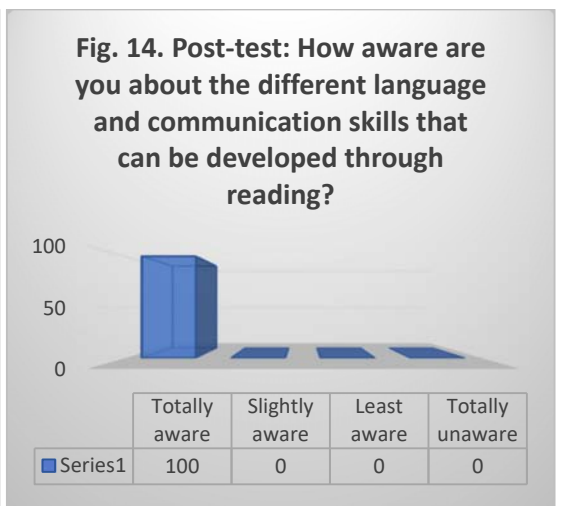
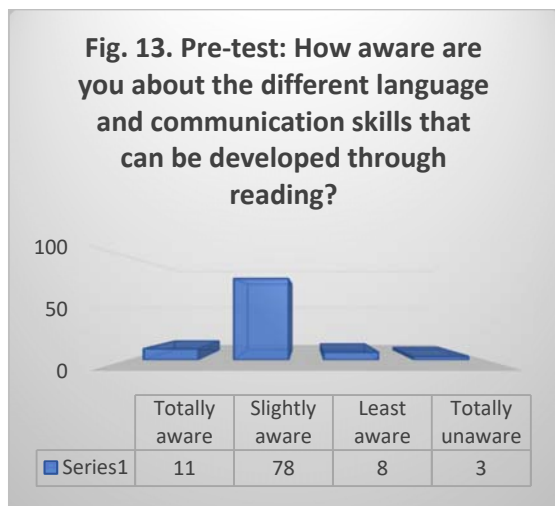
when it is recommended by their teachers or friends. In the post-test, it is found that 32% read when it is recommended by their teachers or friends, 29% read for enjoyment, 16% read for enhancing personal information and 15% read for relaxation. The post test results show a stark improvement in the motivation related to reading which is a positive indication of how the activity model works.



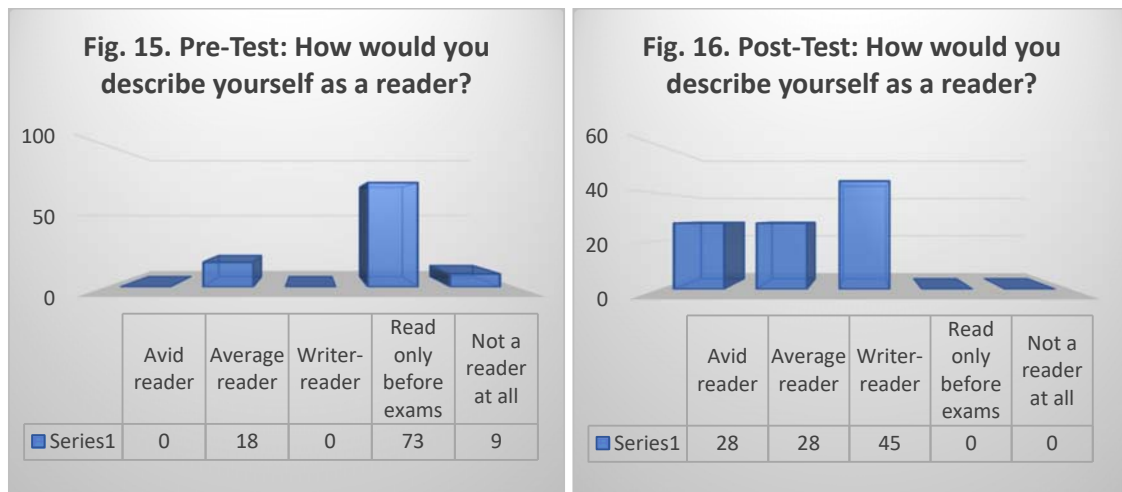
Figures 9 and 10 show how the readers choose a book to read. In the pre-test period, 46% of the respondents said that they do not read because they do not like reading and 41% said that they read books which are related to their course. After the activity model was tested, 70% of the respondents said that they read based on the choice of their interest and 32% said that they read books which are chosen by others and recommended to them. The improvement in the post-test reveals that the change in their perspective in choosing a book to read is on the basis of the development of their interest in reading post the exercises conducted after the activity model was tested upon them.



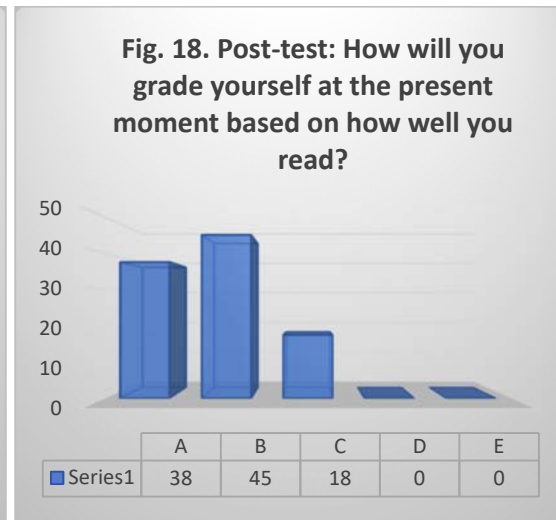
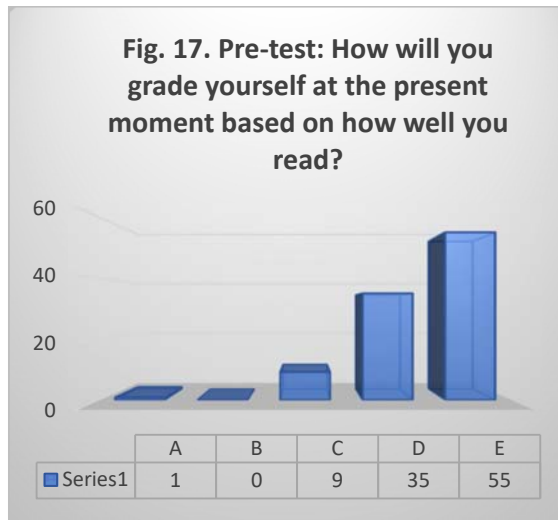
Figures 11 and 12 show the statement which describes the reading style of the young adult readers. Prior to the testing of the activity model, 72% of the respondents say that they read for the sake of reading to pass in the exams. After the testing of the activity model, 40% of the respondents said that they read because they like to spend their time in reading, while 32% said that while reading they reflect while reading and 21% said that they become critical while reading. This is a positive sign that the model is able to instill upon the readers the essence of reading.



Figures 13 and 14 show the awareness among the readers about the development of language and communication skills through reading. Before the test was conducted, 78% of the respondents said that they were slightly aware of it, while 11% said that they were totally aware and 8% said that they were least aware. In the post-test, all the respondents said that they are totally aware of how language and communication skills are developed through reading which is a testament to the efforts one can make in understanding the essence of reading based on the activity model.



Figures 15 and 16 show how the respondents describe themselves as readers. In the pre-test period, 73% of the respondents said that they would describe themselves as readers before exams, 18% as average readers and 9% as readers not at all. In the post-test, 45% of the respondents said that they would describe themselves as writer-readers, and 28% of them said that they are both avid readers and average readers. The results show that after the activity model was tested, the respondents have changed their opinions about reading and have developed a penchant for reading.



Figures 17 and 18 show how the respondents grade themselves as readers. In the pre-test period, 55% of the respondents have graded themselves E (with A being the highest and E being the lowest) and 35% grading themselves as D. In the post-test period 45% of the respondents graded themselves B, 38% graded themselves A and 18% graded themselves C. The post-test result is evidence to show that the activity model has certainly helped the young adult readers to hone their reading skills.

Analysis of the Activity Model:

The Activity Model of Reading is an experimental model which can have its limitations depending upon the perceptions of the young adult readers area-wise or any other situation/s. What is true for this experiment, may not be true when this is put into effect somewhere else. However, the model can be tried in varying situations since the model tries to look at the reading capacities of the young readers from their view-point, analyse their reluctances and then come up with solutions. Activity mode of learning has always been a tested method of teaching-learning process from the Montessori level onwards. Most of the time, it is forgotten

that activities can also help adult learners. This model is just a method of testing the efficacy of utilising activities in improving the reading skills of the young adult readers.

Conclusion:

Reading is not just about choice, but about interest, likes and dislikes. Reading should not be enforced, but must be inculcated through compassionate means. Reading should not be considered an exercise, but as a source of self-realization and self-learning experience. Reading should not be allowed to develop in isolation which happens because of negativity and depression. Reading must be done to learn and gain knowledge and not just for its sake. Motivation and creation of a reading space is extremely essential if we want to generate the habit of reading. Reading should not be seen as something which is demeaning, but rather ameliorating. Sustaining a reading culture should not be linked with monetary benefit(s), but promoting the zeal for reading will in itself sustain a reading culture. Determination, persistence, desire, resolve and a yearning for reading will create an environment conducive towards sustainable reading culture. Reading not for reading's sake, but reading with commitment to fulfil a mission/vision will ensure reading sustainability. Play and Read (Activity) Method can surely induce results if we want the future generation to be good readers too.

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